

## A PEOPLE'S CHURCH

Rev. Dr. Talmage Talks About Boarding House Districts.

He Says New Methods Must Be Accepted in Ministering to Needs of Such Parts of Large Cities.

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LOS ANGELES, CAL., June 18.—In every large city in the Union there is a considerable population to whom this sermon peculiarly applies. The preacher voices their plea for the gospel, and urges that it be no longer rejected. The text is Acts xxi. 9, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

"Nearly Macedonians! What do you mean?" says some one. "Is there any class of people living near to me who have not the gospel preached to them as it ought to be preached? Why, nearly all my life I have been living in one of our large cities. I have sat under some of the greatest preachers of the world. Surely all those who live near to me have the same kind of gospel advantages I have!" No, my friend, you are wrong. There are scores, and hundreds, and thousands, and tens of thousands who have not. Before I get through with my subject I hope to prove to you that my premise is true, for today I am going to speak for the most part to those who have lived nearly all their lives in a large city.

Where did you go to church when you first came to town? "Oh," you say, "I used to worship in such and such a street." The great Dr. So-and-so preached there. But I moved away, and most of my old neighbors moved away long ago. The boarding house element crowded us out. The region where I used to live is now filled with "roomers." Indeed! I suppose very few people are now living in your old street. "Oh, no; quite the contrary," you answer. "Where there used to be one family living a house there are now sometimes twenty or thirty people. Light housekeeping in many instances has made each double room house a whole family." Indeed! Then with the increased population swarming there, I suppose your old church is crowded to the doors. I suppose your old Sunday school is five times larger than it used to be and the church members have taken every pew." "No," you answer. "I only wish that were true. I love that old church more than I have ever loved it. But the trouble is the wealthy people moved away. These old Dr. So-and-so got a call to heaven. Then the people who remained called a fine young man, but he could not make the church go. He struggled on and on. They could not pay him a salary sufficient to live upon and he had to leave. Now the old church has a very ordinary man in the pulpit. The warts are only a sixth full. The whole work there seems to be at a standstill. What is being done is done in the quicksands. One month the people are there and the next they are gone. I am afraid the old church is geographically doomed."

Your old church's work geographically doomed? What! Can such a condition exist at our very doors? There are thousands and hundreds of thousands of a city's population swarming around those old churches. Shall all our best church strongholds be turned to secular uses? Such a condition must not exist. My theme today is a call for help for what is termed the deserted church of the boarding house regions of a large city. I would make a plea for the downtown church which is situated in the heart of a business center of a great city. I have been pastor of such a church as that in Pittsburgh, and I know they can be made useful and prosperous if right methods are adopted. I make not a plea for the church situated in the residential region. I have such a church as that in the beautiful city of Los Angeles. If a man does his work there, it is not difficult to gather in the families. But I make a plea for the "halfway" city church, the church which is not downtown nor uptown. I plead for the church which is surrounded by rooming houses and by the boarding house element—the "halfway church," which is in a region congested with multitudes of people who have not the gospel preached to them as it ought to be. I make a plea for such a church because I have been pastor of one and I know of the almost insurmountable obstacles which it has to overcome.

The "halfway church" of the large city to be a spiritual success must have, in the first place, an earnest band of strong, able-bodied men and women who for the church's sake are ready to help the minister and fill the official positions of that church. It must have tried gospel veterans in its boards of elders, deacons and trustees. It must have able leaders in the Sunday school who know the Bible and are ready to stay by their classes under all conditions. It must have these men and women, not as visitors, but as members in good and regular standing, who are identified with the church because they know they can best serve their Lord and Master and therefore will always be in their places.

Why do I put such an emphasis upon this plea for consecrated men and women in the official boards? A true church leader cannot be created in a day or a week or a month or a year any more than a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a prima donna, can be created in a minute. Supposing I should enter your store some day and say, "Come, Mr. Jones, let me take a trip to Europe and have a dive mouth's vacation?" "Oh, you would say to me, "I cannot go; I have no one with whom to leave the store." "No me?" Why what are you talking about? Here are clerks galore. You have at least twenty men and women in your employ." "I know it," you answer, "but not one of them all is competent to take my place. They are all young men. I cannot make a merchant out of an errand boy in a minute any more than you could make a Thomas A. Edison in a minute out of a young college youth who has just matriculated in the scientific school of Princeton." Yet the strange fact remains that, though church work is the most important of all work, the leading Christian men of a city will get up almost no noise and walk out of these "halfway churches." Thus they will practically say to the minister who is struggling there: "Young man, fill your session with a lot of young people who are utterly inexperienced. Grab right and left for your Sunday school superintendent and teachers, no matter whether they know the Bible or not. We want to go and live on the aristocratic boulevards and go to a swell church. Thus must these leading men, seemingly without the

least compunction, desert their gospel ship when it is in danger of sinking.

It is surprising that these "halfway churches" are destroyed when their strong church leaders desert them in this way! Let me today enter one of our large city churches in the residential districts and take away fifteen of its powerful consecrated church leaders. The next year have another fifteen depart, and so on year by year. Would not the spiritual work of that church be doomed? Yet this is just what is happening to our "halfway churches." The greatest difficulty facing such churches is not that the multitudes are not near by to be reached. These multitudes by the ebb and flow of the "boarding house element" come and go, but there is always a multitude there. The greatest trouble is that the leading positions of those churches are not filled with experienced men and women, with gospel veterans who stick there for the work's sake. These "halfway churches" have not the spiritual leaven to leaven the church loaf. Our Christian workers be ye men or women, you have no right to desert that "halfway church"! There are you need ed fifty, a hundred, times more than you are needed upon the church of the boul evard. I know of what I speak. It is simply an impossibility for any clergyman to make a success of one of those important "halfway churches" unless some of the Christian men and women who are now sitting uselessly in some of our wealthier uptown churches are ready to go down and help them. Again and again in these old "halfway churches" a new session of nine members has been elected, and within six months half of them would be gone.

These "halfway churches" must have the right kind of men and women for their official boards. More than that, they must have money sufficient for their work. Some of this money should be collected from their own people. Most of this money, however, should and must come from outside sources. These churches need it and must have it in the same way that a little child must have help from a father. Supposing I should say to my eight-year-old boy, "Son, you must now earn your living." You would answer me: "That is absurd! Your boy in time will be able to earn his own living, but he cannot do it now." The "halfway church" in one sense is the child. It can do a little for its own support but not enough to be independent of help. But, though our boards of home and foreign missions send their representatives to many different classes, they neglect, for the most part, these "halfway churches," where every dollar invested for Christ will bring the greatest returns ever found in Christian work.

The importance of financial aid for these "halfway churches" can best be illustrated by describing the classes of people to which these churches appeal. They are not "dead beats," loafers and outcasts; they are, for the most part, young men and women students, clerks and young married people. There are many who have known what better days meant, but have been forced on account of misfortune to seek the cheaper lodgings of a town. Shall they not be looked after?

Now, I believe in saving the cannibal in the Congo. I believe in social settlements in the shums. I, however, do not believe in giving so much to the work in the shums and to converting the heathen cannals that we have gone left to give to develop the spiritual life of the farmer's boy and the young girl cleric living almost within a stone's throw of our homes under the shadow of the "halfway church" of a large city. General Lawton said in reference to the regular soldier, "These are not heroes, they are only regulars." These young men and young women are our regulars. There is nothing remarkable about them. There is none of the glamour in work for them that there is in converting cannals, but they neglect, for the most part, these "halfway churches," where every dollar invested for Christ will bring the greatest returns ever found in Christian work.

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